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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 007451

SIPDIS

ROME FOR MFO(LAROCCO/GUDGEON)

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SUBJECT: GOE OFFICIALS RAISE ANTICIPATED CONCERNS ON MFO  
TRANSITION TO UH-60

Classified by ECPO Minister Counselor Michael Corbin for  
reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (U) Summary: NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Dibble separately briefed Foreign Ministry and Liaison Agency with International Organizations (LAWIO) officials on the MFO's upcoming transition to the UH-60 helicopters during meetings in Cairo September 22-24. The Assistant Minister for Legal Affairs and Treaties Abdel Azziz Seif al Nasser promised to study the briefing materials and raise any concerns with the Embassy. After hearing the briefing, LAWIO's General Emir and Colonel Osama noted that getting an additional two million USD to fund the transition would be difficult. In the LAWIO meeting, General Emir stated that MoD was taking all steps to meet MFO security needs. End summary.

2. (U) During her September 22-24 meetings in Cairo, NEA DAS Elizabeth Dibble discussed the upcoming transition to the UH-60 helicopters with Assistant Foreign Minister for Legal Affairs and Treaties Abdel Azziz Seif al Nasser and LAWIO officials General Emir and Colonel Osama. Acknowledging that he is new on the MFO portfolio (having assumed his duties as Assistant Minister just two weeks previously), the Assistant Minister promised to study the briefing material and pass any concerns to the Embassy.

3. (U) LAWIO officials, by comparison to their MFA colleagues, were somewhat critical of the proposed transition, noting that the cost is the primary concern. "The MFO's role has not expanded," Colonel Osama said, adding that the GOE just increased its contribution to the MFO by USD two million. General Emir said that the UH-60 is "more helicopter" than the MFO needs. Colonel Osama complained that the GOE only heard last year that the transition to the UH-60 might cost more money. He also noted that the GOE did not want to pay to train new pilots and expressed a vague concern that the pilots would not be mission ready before April 2006 and that the package of parts for the UH-60s would not be sufficient. Finally, the GOE asked for an increase in the number of offset hours. In response, the DAS promised to check on the parts package and explained the formula by which the USG determines offset hours. She also confirmed that MFO would receive pilots with a range of experience, and said that the U.S. Army was committed to avoiding any disruption in service during the transition.

4. (C) On MFO security, General Emir said that the GOE is addressing all of the MFO's concerns/requests, including the request for additional patrols. He noted, however, that he believes that the MFO was targeted with the IED by people wanting to send a message to the Egyptian police, not the MFO. (Note: Emir is referring to the recent tensions between security forces and the Sinai population arising from the GOE reaction to and investigations into the October 2004 Taba bombing and the July 2005 Sharm El Sheikh bombings. End note.). General Emir and Colonel Osama concluded by acknowledging that that force protection would remain a priority.

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JONES